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ABSTRACT

Conventional research strategies typically emphasize behavior-determining tendencies so strongly that the person as a whole is ignored. Research strategies for studying whole persons focus on symbolic structures, formulate specific questions in advance, study persons one at a time, use individualized measures, and regard participants as expert consultants. Two such techniques, Q-technique and the role repertory test, were used in a study of two college students with spinal cord injuries. Specific questions focused on a stage model of adjustment, the necessity of mourning loss prior to disability acceptance, and the manner in which values theorized to define disability acceptance change across time. A variation of the Critical Incident Technique was used to obtain descriptions of course-of-life landmarks. Both subjects used a 48-item Q sort to describe typical and ideal selves at each landmark episode; the role repertory technique was used to determine significant persons and the constructs defined by their roles. Factor analysis of the Q sortings showed distinctly different ways of adjusting to a major life disruption. The results enhance the sophistication of the stage model of adaptation as applied to individuals, and build on existing methods to enhance the systematic understanding of individuals. (JAC)

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Methods of Studying Persons

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Abstract

A method is described that permits answering research questions of general importance by examining individuals in a comprehensive, whole person manner. The method requires that research questions be formulated in advance and that the person studied be carefully selected for suitability. It also requires the acquisition and analysis of data on symbolic structures, which are systems of meaning and action that define personal identity. Q-technique and the role repertory test are valuable tests for research with individuals. Their use in two studies of persons with spinal cord injuries is described.

Methods of Studying Persons

Conventional research strategies typically emphasize behavior-determining tendencies so strongly that the person as a whole is ignored. They also tend to rely on group statistics or comparisons that yield little information about individuals. Understanding persons as complex, unique, pluralistic (Ogilvy, 1977) and heterarchically organized (Palmer, 1969; Ricoeur, 1974) entities requires a departure from reductionist methods. A comprehensive study of a person would examine that individual as a symbol constructor and user. Symbolic structures are systems of meaning that constitute the context within which component processes such as behavior and traits take place and through which meanings are expressed.

Positivistic or justificationist theory and hypothetico-deductive methods are inadequate as ways to study persons (Earle, 1968; Polyani, 1958; Weimer, 1979). These approaches require claims to knowledge to rest upon absolute truth; they assume that science results in the discovery and accumulation of uncontestable facts. However, no one theory can ever be "proved" because the idealized hypothetico-deductive procedures rely on sensory experience -- data that only indirectly represent environmental objects. Furthermore, interpretations of sensory data are influenced by psychological processes that add meaning to direct experiences. Finally, the hypothetico-deductive approach fallaciously affirms the consequent (Rychlak, 1981), because it is always the case that many theories can predict the same observed outcome.

The study of persons requires an understanding of actions from multiple causal perspectives. Whereas conventional research paradigms regard only efficient causes as a valid basis for predicting behavior,

a more complete understanding of persons results from examining relational (formal) and purposive (final) causes.

The purposes of systematic, person-focussed studies include confirming and objectifying clinical and/or social experience, constructing a typology of persons, providing paradigms others may employ in the future, specifying critical differences between person types, and permitting specification of subsequent case selection criteria. Their goal is not to list a fixed set of behavioral laws, universal traits or stages of development, but to acquire multiple, internally consistent theories that can be used to describe and explain symbolic structures.

Research strategies for studying whole persons focus on symbolic structures, formulate specific questions in advance, study persons one at a time, use individualized measures and regard participants as expert consultants. Measures compatible with such a method must be flexible in content and adaptable to the study of a variety of topics. The Q-technique (Stephenson, 1953) and the role repertory technique (Kelly, 1955; Bannister & Mair, 1968; Fransella & Bannister, 1977) are ideally suited to the purpose.

Two studies demonstrate how this type of research may be conducted. Both persons had spinal cord injuries and were experts on their own coping strategies.

Methods

One purpose of these studies was to describe the process of adjustment following a major life disruption. Specific questions focussed attention on a stage model of adjustment, the necessity of mourning loss prior to disability acceptance, and the manner in which values theorized to define disability acceptance change across time.

Two persons were chosen who came from similar socioeconomic and religious backgrounds, who were injured more than two years prior to study, and who possessed adequate verbal skills to report experiences, thoughts and feelings, but who had notably different kinds of adjustment.

The first person, Craig, was an undergraduate university student with an excellent academic record who was injured 28 months prior to study in a hang-gliding accident. He worked hard in rehabilitation and was motivated to return to school, but attempted suicide within weeks of his return. Deirdre was pursuing a career in rehabilitation psychology at the time of study and appeared well adjusted. She was injured nine and one half years prior to study while a passenger in her family's car. Both persons had limited use of their upper extremities, were mobile in electric wheelchairs and vans, were 24 years old at the time of study, and came from middle-income, Roman Catholic families.

A variation of the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) was used with both persons to obtain decriptions of course-of-life landmarks. Each person identified an event that occurred shortly after hospitalization (episode 1), an event when life seemed to lack purpose (episode 2), a postinjury event when hope for the future was high (episode 3), and an event in the present (episode 4). The episodes were keyed to theoretical stages of crisis adaptation described by Fink (1967): shock, defensive retreat (episode 1), acknowledgement (episode 2), and adaptation (episode 3 and 4).

A 48-item Q-sort developed by Heinemann and Shontz (in press) was used to assess the four theoretical stages of reaction to crises. Expert opinion was used to select 12 items in each category. Items were sorted by Craig and Deirdre in a quasi-normal distribution to

describe typical and ideal selves at each of these episodes for a total of eight sortings. Table 1 lists scale items.

Insert Table 1 about here

The role repertory technique (Kelly, 1955) was used to determine significant persons in each participant's life and constructs defined by these roles. Sixteen roles were defined, including usual and ideal self (preinjury, currently and in the future); another person with the same disability; best friend; mother; father; brother; sister; intelligent, successful and interesting persons; and a typical patient met during rehabilitation. Both persons developed 12 constructs by examining triads of role designators, telling how two are similar and how the third differs from them. Seven standard theoretical constructs were also included: copes well with adversity, acknowledges limitations and lives life to the fullest, values physical achievement and skill, values physique and physical attractiveness, compares self with others, values self because of intrinsic (personal) assets or characteristics, and experiences emotion intensely.

Results

Q-sort Deirdre described herself with items that indicated defensive retreat at episode 1, acknowledgement at episode 2 and adaptation at episodes 3 and 4. The correlations between her typical and ideal selves was -.13 at episode 1, -.72 at episode 2, .44 at episode 3, and .95 at episode 4 indicating greater congruence with her ideal self following a time when she was most despairing. A factor analysis of her Q-sortings (Table 2) revealed two major factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The first factor describes her in the

present. Prominent characteristics in this factor are feeling worthwhile, being future-oriented, and receiving satisfaction from new values and goals. The second factor describes her ideal selves at episodes 1, 2 and 3 and her typical self at episode 2 (negatively loaded). Characteristics describing these roles are expecting to return to preinjury self and maintaining control of everything in her life.

Insert Table 2 about here

Craig selected items that indicated primarily acknowledgement at episode 1 and 2, adaptation at episode 3 and acknowledgement at episode 4. The correlations between his typical and ideal selves range from .49 at episode 2 to .75 at episode 3. Intermediate values were .62 at episode 1 and .73 at episode 4. No large difference between correlations or trend in values is discernible. Factor analysis (Table 3) revealed two major factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The first factor contains his ideal self-sortings at all episodes while the second factor contains his typical self-sortings at all episodes. Characteristics describing his ideal self include being able to cope, learning the satisfaction of a challenge well met, and learning how to deal with his handicaps. All of these items are indicative of the adaptation stage. He described his typical self as being able to cope, not being able to avoid the grim reality of his situation, and being worse than before his accident.

Insert Table 3 about here

Role Rep Technique Deirdre's constructs, listed in Table 4, suggest a concern with nurturance and psychological sophistication. The factor analysis of her roles (Table 5) produced five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Factor I is composed of her typical and ideal selves currently and in the future as well as the intelligent and successful persons. They perceive multiple levels of reality, are even-tempered, achieve integration of professional and personal interests, cope well with adversity, acknowledge limitations and live life to the fullest, value self because of intrinsic assets, and experience emotions intensely. Factor II is composed of her typical and ideal preinjury self, her brother, a typical patient, and a person with the same disablity. They are alike by seeking an insular world, perceiving only a single level of reality, being even-tempered, not having achieved integration of professional and personal interests, and valuing physical achievement and skill. Factor III is composed of her preinjury ideal self and her mother. They are alike in that both seek an insular world, perceive only a single level of reality, seek to nurture through parenting, emphasize professional interests, value their intrinsic assets, and experience emotions intensely. Factor IV is composed of her father, sister and an interesting person. They are alike by being involved in professional interests, comparing selves with others and experiencing emotions intensely. Factor IV is composed of a single role, her best friend. This friend is interested in internal growth, open to the world and giving, is even-tempered and compares self with others.

Insert Tables 4 & 5 about here

Craig's constructs, listed in Table 6, show a concern with physical function, achievement and competence, and interests in specific objects and activities such as children, outdoor recreation, music and science. Physical ability is linked with success and happiness. The factor analysis of his roles (Table 7) produced four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Factor I is composed of his ideal selves preinjury, currently and in the future, his mother, sister and an interesting person. They are alike by being happy and interested in their work, having outdoor and intellectual interests, intelligence, competence and experiencing emotion intensely. The second factor is composed of his typical preinjury self, best friend, brother and intelligent and successful persons. They share characteristics of happiness, being physically able, interests in science and coping well with adversity. His current and future typical selves compose the third factor and are alike by sharing outdoor, musical performance, science and engineering interests, valuing physique and physical attractiveness as well as intrinsic assets. His father and a typical patient compose the fourth factor and are similar by perceiving humor in many situations, liking children and having outdoor interests.

Insert Tables 6 & 7 about here

Discussion of Methods and Results

These studies show two distinctly different ways of adjusting to a major life disruption. The detailed information provided by these procedures suggests why Deirdre proceeded through the hypothesized stages and Craig did not. Deirdre's willingness to mourn her lost

abilities and physical functions contrasts sharply with Craig's course of dwelling upon physical values and tackling rehabilitation tasks without attending to his affective responses. The independence of idealized self and experienced self evident in the factor analysis of Craig's Q-sortings is notably different from Deirdre's "adjusted" self and "unadjusted" self factors. Likewise the constructs they use to distinguish among themselves and others are different. Craig's constructs focus on achievement and physical performance and associate these with positive emotional states while Deirdre's constructs reflect psychological sophistication and a need for nurturance.

These two studies enhance the sophistication of the stage model of adaptation, as applied to individuals. They show that symbolic integration of loss is more complete in one person who went through the hypothesized stages than it is in another person who did not. Mourning of loss does <u>not</u> appear to be essential for adaptation at the behavioral level alone; Craig became a successful student again after his suicide attempt. However, mourning may be essential if a loss is ever to be fully incorporated into the symbolic structure, as it clearly is in the case of Deirdre.

Obviously, adoption of the metatheoretical position and methods proposed here requires an expansion of psychological research, not only by augmenting the methodolgical procedures, but by including topics such as symbolic structures, multi-level causality, ethics and morals (Shontz, 1983). The research described here extends the tradition established by investigators such as Kurt Goldstein, William Stern, Henry Murray, Robert White, Carl Rogers, Kurt Lewin and Gordon Allport. It incorporates existing methods and builds upon them to help enhance our systematic understanding of human beings.

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TABLE 1
Q-SORT ITEMS

Shock

1. Threatened by what is happening to me
2. Wonder if I will survive
3. More is happening to me than I can absorb
4. Too much is happening at once
5. Panicked
6. *Anxious*
7. Helpless
8. Afraid
9. Thinking is disorganized
10. Irrational
11. In doubt about what's happening to me
12. Confused about what has happened to me

Defensive Retreat

13. Feel I am the same as I've always been
14. Believe my current state is just temporary
15. I'll soon be just like I was before
16. Never think about my injury
17. My paralysis will disappear
18. Soon be my old self again
19. Everything in my life is under control
20. Relieved knowing I'll soon be well and on my way again
21. Indifferent to things happening about me
22. Intend to continue my familiar way of doing things
23. Plan to keep the goals and values I've had all my life
24. Determined to keep on living exactly as before

Acknowledgement

25. Wonder if I am still the same person I was before my accident
26. No longer the person I was before my accident
27. Worse than I was before my accident
28. Feel of little worth
29. The grim reality of my situation can't be avoided
30. Often wonder what's the use of doing anything
31. Feel the world should take care of me now
32. Depressed
33. Sad
34. Bitter about what has happened to me
35. Often ask myself why this happened to me
36. My disability is in the forefront of my attention

Adaptation and Change

37. Can learn to be of value to the world
38. A person of worth
39. Having this disability is a valuable experience
40. Exploring strengths and resources again
41. I didn't choose to be disabled; but, I have a choice in what to do about it now that I am
42. Getting to know own abilities
43. Satisfied with the new things I'm doing
44. Learning the satisfaction of a challenge well met
45. Planning for the future in line with my known strengths and weaknesses
46. New values and goals will bring satisfaction in the future
47. Am able to cope with my new situation
48. Know my handicaps and am learning how to deal with them

TABLE 2
Q-Sort Factor Analysis: Deirdre

Factor	Eigenvalue	Sortings	Factor Loadings
I	4.043	Episode 1 (Onset): Typical Self	-.536
		Episode 2 (Despair): Typical Self	.833
		Episode 3 (Hope): Typical Self	.937
		Episode 4 (Present): Ideal Self	.983
II	2.090	Episode 1 (Onset): Ideal Self	.769
		Episode 2 (Despair): Typical Self	-.742
		Episode 3 (Hope): Ideal Self	.985
		Episode 4 (Present): Ideal Self	.779

TABLE 3
Q-Sort Factor Analysis: Craig

Factor	Eigenvalue	Sortings	Factor Loadings
I	5.706	Episode 1 (Disability Onset): Ideal Self	.750
		Episode 2 (Despair): Ideal Self	.837
		Episode 3 (Hope) Ideal Self	.898
		Episode 4 (Present): Ideal Self	.935
II	0.895	Episode 1 (Disability Onset) Typical Self	.687
		Episode 2 (Despair): Typical Self	.916
		Episode 3 (Hope): Typical Self	.765
		Episode 4 (Present): Typical Self	.687

TABLE 4
Role Repertory Test Constructs and Contrasts: Deirdre

Construct	vs.	Contrast
1. Interested in internal growth		1. Interested in outside world and social convention
2. Seeks integration with universe		2. Seeks insular world
3. Open to world and giving		3. Constricted, giving to only a few
4. Perceives multiple levels of reality		4. Perceives single level of reality
5. Acknowledges multi-leveled reality		5. Acknowledges conventional Christian reality
6. Even tempered, slow to anger		6. Hyper, quick tempered
7. Less involved in professional interests		7. More involved in professional interests
8. Accepting of one's disability		8. Attempts to conceal one's disability
9. Seeks to nurture through parenting		9. Disinterested in parenting
10. Feels antipathy towards organizations		10. Prefers organizations in achieving goals
11. Achieved integration of professional and personal interests		11. Emphasizes professional interests
12. No holds barred nurturance		12. Strings attached nurturance
13. Copes well with adversity		
14. Acknowledges limitations and lives life to the fullest		
15. Values physical achievement and skill		
16. Values physique and physical attractiveness		
17. Compares self with others		
18. Values self because of intrinsic assets or characteristics		
19. Experiences emotions intensely		

TABLE 5
Factor Analysis of Deirdre's Role Repertory Test Roles

Factor	Eigenvalue	Roles	Factor Loadings	Characteristic Constructs
I	5.578	1. Current typical self	.788	Perceives multiple levels of reality
		2. Current ideal self	.952	
		5. Future typical self	.788	Even-tempered
		6. Future ideal self	.952	Copes well with adversity
		12. Intelligent person	.868	Values self because of intrinsic assets
		13. Successful person	.685	
II	3.138	3. Pre-injury typical self	.595	Seeks insular world
		4. Pre-injury ideal self	.551	Perceives single level of reality
		10. Brother	.864	Values physical achievement
		15. Typical patient	.948	
		16. Person with same disability	.698	
III	2.730	4. Preinjury ideal self	.559	Seeks to nurture through parenting
		8. Mother	.873	Experience emotion intensely
IV	1.651	9. Father	.694	Compares self with others
		11. Sister	.927	Involved in professional interests
		14. Interesting person	.579	
V	1.014	7. Boyfriend	.844	Open to the world & giving Nurtures with no-holds-barred

TABLE 6

Role Repertory Test Constructs and Contrasts: Craig

Construct	vs.	Contrast
1. Physically capable and successful		1. Less physically capable
2. Successful in achieving goals and happy		2. Less successful and less happy
3. Happy and interested in work while recognizing physical limitations		3. Less bour by physical limits
4. Less happy and less physically capable		4. Happier and more physically capable
5. Likes children		5. Not interested in parenting
6. Outdoor interests		6. Social interests
7. Possesses interests in playing muscial instrument		7. No interest in playing musical instruments
8. Intellectual interests		8. Physical interests
9. Scientific/engineering interests		9. Psychology/humanities interests
10. Science interests and physical ability		10. Social science interests and low physical ability
11. Intelligence and competence		11. Inactive, not applying self in few situations
12. Perceives humor in many situations		12. Perceives humor in few situations
13. Copes well with adversity		
14. Acknowledges limitations and lives life to the fullest		
15. Values physical achievement and skill		
16. Values physique and physical attractiveness		
17. Compares self with other		
18. Values self because of intrinsic assets or characteristics		
19. Experiences emotion intensely		

TABLE 7
Factor Analysis of Craig's Role Repertory Test Roles

Factor	Eigenvalue	Roles	Factor Loadings	Characteristic Constructs
I	6.106	2. Current ideal self	.831	Happy & interested in work
		4. Pre-injury ideal self	.766	Posses outdoor & intellectural interests
		6. Future ideal self	.831	
		8. Mother	.905	Intelligent; competent
		11. Sister	.593	
		14. Interesting Person	.742	
II	2.400	3. Pre-injury typical self	.639	Physically able
		7. Best friend	.521	Interested in science
		10. Brother	.757	Copes well with adversity
		12. Intelligent person	.963	
		13. Successful person	.586	
III	1.903	1. Current typical self	.940	Interests in out-of-doors, music performance, science & engineering
		5. Future typical self	.896.	
IV	1.527	9. Father	.689	Likes children
		15. Typical patient	.707	Perceives humor in many situations